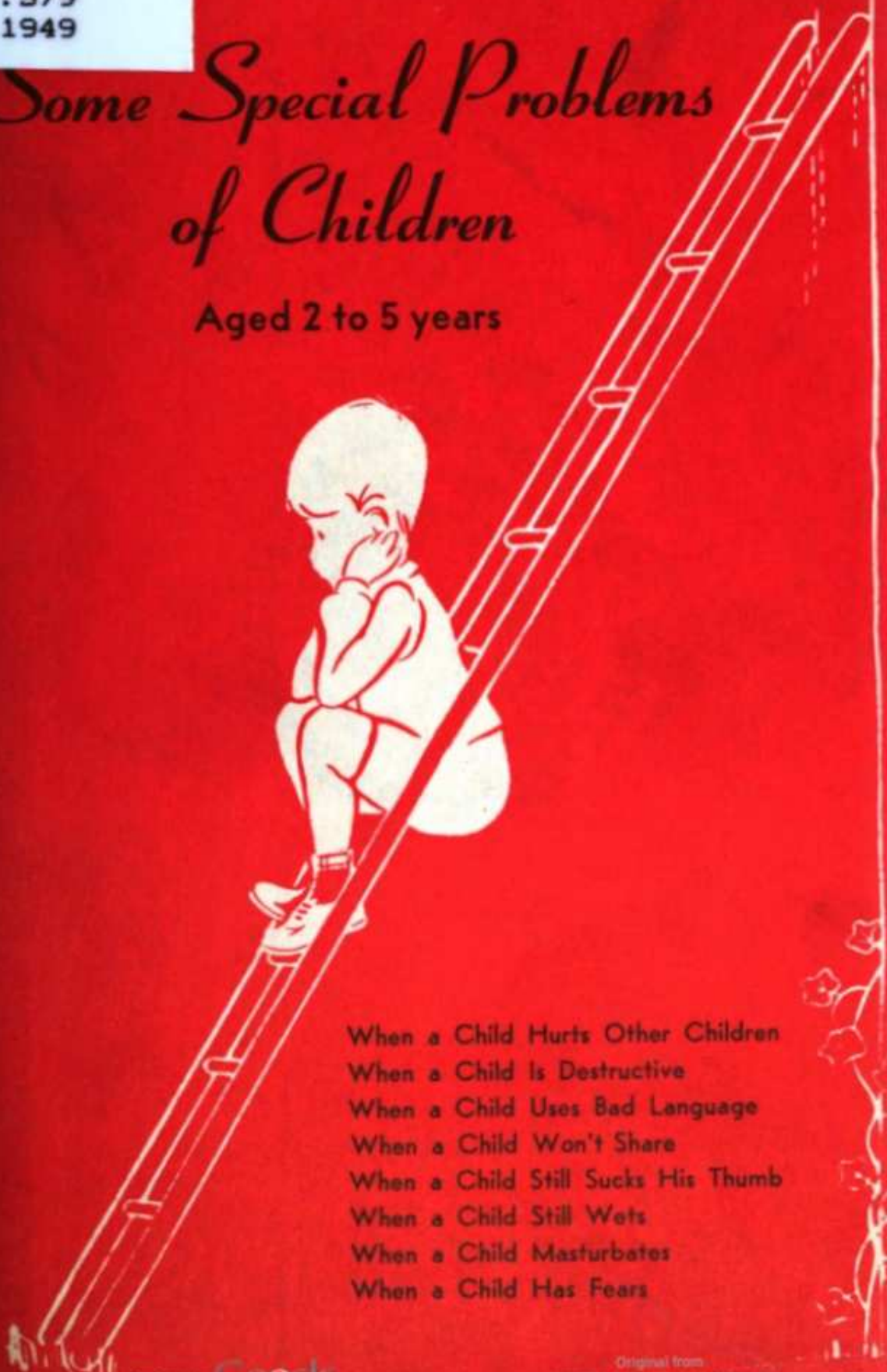
SOC
HQ
769
.S79
1949

25¢

Some Special Problems of Children

Aged 2 to 5 years



When a Child Hurts Other Children
When a Child Is Destructive
When a Child Uses Bad Language
When a Child Won't Share
When a Child Still Sucks His Thumb
When a Child Still Wets
When a Child Masturbates
When a Child Has Fears

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

State Charities Aid Association (New York).
New York City Committee on Mental Hygiene.

Some Special Problems of Children

Aged 2 to 5 years

Planned and Written by
NINA RIDENOUR, PH.D.

in collaboration with
ISABEL JOHNSON

Illustrations by Barbara Cooney

Published by
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH, INC.
1790 Broadway New York 19, New York
in association with
The New York State Society for Mental Health
State Charities Aid Association

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SOCIAL WORK
HV
741
.S79
1949

Foreword

THE crucial importance of the early years of childhood in the formation of wholesome and happy personalities is beyond question. How to help our children to grow up as emotionally healthy people is a source of continuous concern to all of us. Our keen desire to do a good job is sometimes limited by our uncertainty about the way to accomplish this all-important goal.

It is with considerable satisfaction that I recommend *"Some Special Problems of Children"* to parents and all others who work with children because it is a most helpful guide in assisting us to understand and to deal with vital and everyday problems of normal children. Its popularity with parents and with professional people is more than justified.

ROBERT H. FELIX, M.D., *Director*
National Institute of Mental Health
Public Health Service
Department of Health, Education,
and Welfare

First Edition, October, 1947
Second Edition, First Printing, 200,000 *copies, March,* 1949
Second Edition, Second Printing, 100,000 *copies, June,* 1949
Second Edition, Third Printing, 100,000 *copies, April,* 1950
Second Edition, Fourth Printing, 100,000 *copies, July,* 1951
Second Edition, Fifth Printing, 50,000 *copies, July,* 1953
Second Edition, Sixth Printing, 50,000 *copies June* 1955

All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced without permission, except passages of not more than 500 words in length which may be quoted with full credit.

Copyright, 1947. New York Committee on Mental Hygiene of the State Charities Aid Association

Printed in the United States of America

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

DC
gift / Charles Garvin
07/13/01
ocd

Introduction

By LAWRENCE K. FRANK

Writer, Lecturer, and Authority on Family Relations

PARENTS today are often confused and perplexed, eager to do what is good for their children but frequently unable to discover what is desirable or to reconcile the sometimes conflicting advice they receive.

This difficulty arises from a number of sources. Intensive study over the past thirty years has provided much new knowledge of how children grow and develop and has given new insights and understanding of the emotional needs and difficulties of young children.

This knowledge and these insights are leading to a new way of thinking about children. It is becoming clear, in the light of this new approach, that many of our long accepted beliefs and our customary ways of treating children are no longer desirable, indeed may be the source of some of the deplorable outcomes seen in later years.

Thus today we are beginning to shift the emphasis from the "problem child" to a concern for the "problems of the child." This new approach assumes that whatever a child says or does is meaningful; it reveals his personality, his strivings, his needs and sometimes his difficulties. Moreover, it regards the many forms of behavior which so often disturb parents as indicators, not of evil intent or deliberate naughtiness, as we have long believed, but of acute needs, too heavy burdens, of too many denials or of unresolved conflicts and emotional disturbances for which the child needs parental help.

While these new ideas may at first be upsetting to parents, they give promise of helping us to realize some of

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

our cherished ideals. For ages we have heard the injunction to love little children; today we are learning not only how much children need the warm, cherishing love of parents but, what is more important, how parents must provide this love with sympathetic understanding, if children are to grow up capable of living up to our ideals and ethical standards. We are also recognizing that the child needs parental love most when he is least lovable—when he exhibits some of those forms of behavior that seem so undesirable or unacceptable to parents.

This booklet has been prepared to meet the expressed need of parents for helpful, practical guidance in meeting some of these frequent problems of children. While the booklet is called *Some Special Problems of Children, Aged 2 to 5 Years,* it deals with "the vital and everyday problems of *normal* children," as Dr. Felix has pointed out.

Reading this booklet should encourage parents to believe and trust in their children, to realize that the child wants to grow up and has the potentialities for becoming a sane, wholesome, cooperative adult if we will provide love and security, with the understanding and patient help he so acutely needs for meeting these problems of childhood.

Contents

When a Child Hurts Other Children 5
When a Child Is Destructive 13
When a Child Uses Bad Language 23
When a Child Won't Share 29
When a Child Still Sucks His Thumb 35
When a Child Still Wets 43
When a Child Masturbates 53
When a Child Has Fears 61

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Hurts Other Children

WATCHING a small, defenseless child being hurt is emotional dynamite for the onlooker. Outrage, feelings that justice must be done and sympathy for the little victim are natural emotions in such a situation. And yet if the villain of the piece is another youngster, we cannot let our emotions run away with us. Whenever small children are together, there are bound to be incidents in which someone is hurting and someone is being hurt. Natural sympathy and outrage tell you to put a stop to it; coolheaded reason also tells you the child's behavior is harmful, disruptive and disturbing to all concerned and cannot be allowed. Something must be done . . . but what?

Some people say that it's easy to stop the child who hurts others. They say action is what counts — that you should give the child a severe scolding, spank him, pay him back with the same behavior so "he'll know what it feels like," show him he's bad, or make him apologize. These advisers have examples to which they point proudly to prove that their theory works. But what they cannot see nor show

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

you is the price that has been paid by the child who is punished thus. Nor do they realize that their "short cuts" are often the longest way round the problem in the end.

Some parents go to the other extreme. They ignore the actions of the child who hurts others. They like to think this child is showing a healthy toughness or courage. Neither extreme is good. More patience and straight thinking are required to accomplish the important task of understanding and helping the child with his difficulties so that eventually he no longer needs to hurt others.

Hurting Is Sometimes Intentional

Children may hurt unintentionally. They may try it just to see what happens. They may do it to let off steam, just as they would kick or hit a toy. They may be so completely absorbed in their play that they become heedless. They may be unaware that what they do can cause other people pain.

We should not get excited about every little fight, scratch and bump. But when children's actions repeatedly result in injury to others, you must accept the fact that they deliberately intend to hurt. This idea, that children may *want* to hurt may seem shocking at first. But if the child is to benefit, it must be accepted for what it is . . . a natural part of any child's makeup. Occasional hurting can be overlooked. Persistent hurting, however, is a distress signal indicating that the child needs your help.

Hurting May Express Troubled Feelings

Underneath their seemingly unreasonable actions children have their own reasons for wanting to hurt. Though they are unable to tell you in words, they are nevertheless showing you by behaving this way that they feel troubled, jealous, incapable or frustrated. When the adult has such feelings, he can resort to withering sarcasm or some unkind remarks. The child instead kicks, pinches, pulls hair, or he may choose biting—the most effective and primitive of his weapons. He may even try to hurt *things*. For the moment his pent-up anger is released.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

At the root of this anger, which all children feel more or less at times (and which we too felt as children), is an uncertainty about the world and how to deal with it. All children do at least a little fighting, biting, hitting and the like when they are learning to get along. But the child who constantly resorts to these things is a worried, anxious youngster. If he persists in hurting over a period of time, it is a sign that he needs special help. It may therefore be best to consult a psychiatrist or someone who knows a lot about children. Usually, however, this like many other problems of children, is a passing phase and can be handled well enough by patient and observant parents.

Should He Be Allowed to Hurt Others?

Of course not! He has to learn how to get along with other people, to respect their feelings and their rights. This is a most important and valuable lesson. Just because he acts tough and aggressive at an early age, though, does not mean that he is on his way to becoming a cruel bully when he grows up. He is young and has not had a chance to learn how to be civilized. He should be helped to understand that hurting others cannot be allowed.

He must be prevented from hurting for another equally important reason. He needs to be checked for his own peace of mind. He knows deep down that he shouldn't hurt but he can't help himself. Therefore, he needs to know that there is someone who loves him who will control him, who will not allow him to hurt others. To find that there are limits beyond which he cannot go is reassuring to him. At the same time he should not be treated as if he were bad because that may be something he's already been worrying about. To have it confirmed only adds to his guilty feeling and drives him to further misconduct.

Punishment Is Not the Solution

When he is punished or scolded, it seems to him that his mother or teacher or other adults, whom he loves and needs, turn against him. Utterly dependent upon the adult's love and protection he may try to hide his feelings the next

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

time he has a hostile urge. But the feelings still remain, perhaps even intensified by punishment.

Handling this child is not merely a matter of protecting others from getting hurt. He is often in much greater need of help than his victim. Since he behaves the way he does because he feels unhappy, angry, worried or guilty, it is clear that scoldings and punishment will only increase his problems.

Avoid Negative Methods Such As These

- Don't bite, hit, scratch the child back. Tit-for-tat treatment does not "teach him what it is like" but rather that this is a harsh, cruel world full of powerful adults who will hurt him.
- Try not to think in terms of a "punishment to fit the crime." Instead think of *what will help the child.*
- Never indicate in words or actions that he is considered wicked or bad.
- Better not demand apologies or ask him to promise never to do it again. You may get an appearance of conformity while resentment is building up underneath.
- Don't tell him you like him only when he's good, not when he's naughty. Let him know you love him at *all* times.
- Try not to allow your sympathy for the victim or your sense of justice make you angry. Keep your head.

Here Are Some Better Ways of Handling the Situations

- If you catch him about to hurt, or in the act of hurting, quietly prevent it. Sometimes you will need to hold him. Say, "You mustn't do that to Sally. It hurts her," or "You're hurting Sally." Or, if you happen to be the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

victim, say, "I won't let you do that. It hurts." Or, "That's not friendly."

- If you arrive on the scene too late to prevent an incident, soothe the hurt child. Explain without any hint of blame in your voice, "He was tired"—if you think that was the case, or "He didn't realize he was hurting."
- When a child has hurt someone, take him away from the other children for a short time. You do this not as a punishment but to give him a chance to pull himself together. You may say, "You're not ready to be with other children just now."
- Step in and divert the child. Start him doing something else. He will get your idea just as clearly as if you delivered a sermon.
- Try to arrange things so that the two children who have come into conflict, are able to play happily together later on.
- Practice the rule—calmly, consistently, firmly—that whenever a toy or tool or any object is used to hurt or threaten another child, that object will be taken away.
- Teach him gradually that some things are socially acceptable and some are not, and that when he does certain things, such as hurting others, people do not like it. Be sure, however, that in trying to get this point across, you do not let him build up a fear that *he* is not loved, or that he will be loved only if he is a "good boy." Assure him that *he* is liked and loved but there are some things he just must not do.

That Ounce of Prevention—Day In, Day Out

Though the following means may seem indirect, they actually go to the very core of the problem and its solution:

Search for ways to make him feel he is an accepted, important, able child. Give him more opportunities to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

follow his interests. Offer him chances in play and other activities to show self-assertion and strength. Provide him with physical outlets in play—chances to pound, play with clay, to make noise, run hard, kick a large ball.

Give him a little extra affection at times when he has been corrected or criticized. Watch for opportunities when you can praise him. Give him more of your time if you possibly can.

The Other Side of the Problem: The Child Who Is Hurt

If Johnny is bitten or scratched or pummelled by Billy, not only does Johnny have a real injury but he has injured feelings too. These may make his real hurt seem twice as bad, —to him and to his mother too. Both of them may "over-react"—that is, they may act as if the hurt were worse than it actually is. This is understandable because they are reacting to more than the injury itself. The fact that Billy attacked Johnny, makes mother and Johnny angry and frustrated. They would like to pay him back.

It is very natural to resent a child's attack on your child. There is something rather dreadful about seeing some other child's teeth marks on your child, and certainly a jagged scratch down his cheek seems much worse if it was put there by another child than it does if he were scratched by the cat or fell off his tricycle. Mothers take these things seriously and many quarrels between neighbors have started from such incidents.

If you are the mother of the hurt child, it may help you to be a little less upset if you sort out these two elements in your feelings: your genuine concern for your child's injury, and your anger at any child (and his mother) who dares to treat your child so. If you are the mother of the child who does the hurting, do not pooh-pooh the other mother's rage, but remember that you might feel that way too if your child were the hurt one.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

If a child stands still, does not try to protect himself and deliberately and repeatedly lets himself be hurt by other children, then that child is in need of help. He may have to be taught a little about how to defend himself and should be encouraged to be more independent and aggressive. Say to him "Don't let him do that to you." As with all other problems of children, try to figure out *why* he is overly passive and help him to build greater confidence in himself.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Is Destructive

IF your little daughter knocks over an empty tin can while playing in the kitchen, the matter is quickly overlooked. If, however, while playing in the living room, she knocks over and breaks your best lamp, she may get a good, sound scolding and perhaps a smack or two. To her, both acts were the same since in neither case did she intend to be destructive. To you they look quite different because of the value of the object and the extent of the damage.

It is important to keep these different viewpoints in mind when dealing with the destructiveness of small children. All children break and destroy things. To keep your composure and see it from the child's view is sometimes very hard. But it is quite necessary for the child's sake as well

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

as for the peace and order of the household. In each case look for the reasons for the destructiveness. Some destructiveness is accidental and some is intentional, and the way you handle the problem will depend partly on what is behind it.

Some Examples of Destruction Which Are Purely Accidental

Suppose a child reaches up to a table and tugs at a bowl that is on it.

This is what happens	*This is what the parent often does*
1. It nearly tips over but not quite.	1. No notice is taken.
2. There is water in the bowl and a few drops spill.	2. The child is warned, told to be more careful, perhaps threatened if he does it again mother will slap his hands.
3. The water spills all over the floor.	3. Mother is annoyed at the nuisance and he is scolded for making trouble.
4. There is food in the bowl and it spills over the floor.	4. He is scolded for being wasteful.
5. There is paint in the bowl which spills, ruining his clothes, the table and the floor.	5. He is scolded for being destructive and is probably punished.
6. There is hot water in the bowl which spills, burning him.	6. Mother shows alarm and sympathy.

In each of these six examples, the child had but one aim—a wish to explore and investigate. Yet notice the different types of reaction from adults which he might have had to meet.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

OR—suppose the situation is something like this: a child flings a doll across the room.

This is what happens	*This is what the parent might do*
1. It lands on a nearby chair.	1. No comment.
2. The doll breaks.	2. Child is scolded for being destructive and told he "should not be given nice toys."
3. The doll hits an expensive vase, knocks it over and breaks it.	3. Child is punished for being destructive.

In these last three instances, again the child's activity in itself was not blameworthy. Perhaps he was merely bubbling over with high spirits without the slightest intent to destroy. Perhaps he *was* angry and getting rid of his anger on the doll. Instead of hitting his mother or playmate, he relieves his anger by throwing the doll. That's a normal, healthy child's reaction.

Curiosity (in the first set of examples) and energy (in the second)—who on earth could find fault with these two human qualities? It is not only unfair to penalize a child for such activity but it is harmful. These are qualities for the adult to foster, not dampen with scolding and punishment. How can this be done? The child is too young to be hemmed in by constant "dont's" and "be careful." Yet breakage and damage must be cut down to a minimum.

How to Cut Down Accidental Destruction

- Go over the house right now and see what things you can put away or move so that the child will not get involved with them—that pile of books he's always upsetting, that little flower stand that is always in his way. You'll be surprised how much can be arranged with little inconvenience to you and for greater safety and freedom for the child.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

- Give the child as much freedom in playing as possible. This means a place to play hard with other children, sturdy toys which will serve as an outlet for his boundless energy. If you can give him a place where he can "let go," it will be easier for him to learn that there are some places which are *not* for play.
- Try to look ahead for the situations which may end in destruction so that they can be avoided. If Tommy is throwing a ball in the living room, it's time to suggest a move to larger or more suitable space, outdoors if possible, or at least to substitute a less hazardous game.
- Realize that indifference or carelessness with material objects is typical of all children. It shows a good healthy, carefree spirit which one wants to see in young children. It's a phase in their development. There's time enough for them to outgrow it. Remember that part of the drive to destructive activity is but a variation of the drive which also leads to conquering obstacles—the drive which later may help him to be successful in business.
- Expect a good deal of wear and tear. Children are naturally harder on things than adults are—not only because of their indifference, but also because they lack muscular coordination. They will improve with time. By giving the child as much freedom as possible, it might seem as though he is being encouraged to be careless and that he might carry on with this trait when he is older. The contrary is true. When restrictions are few, the child is more able to respond to the "don'ts" that are necessary, in his own home, in friends' homes, or elsewhere. As he grows, he can gradually be taught to respect valuables and things which belong to adults.

Sometimes the Child is Intentionally Destructive

In some children, the destructive tendency is excessive and there seems to be clear-cut evidence of a wilful intent to destroy. These children are in need of help from the mother, the father and the teacher. The child who is purposely de-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

structive will often show a desire to destroy things belonging to:

- one child in particular, often a brother or sister.
- a whole group of children.
- certain children, those older or younger; of the same or opposite sex; new children he doesn't know.
- mother and father, household things.
- himself.

Why does he have this desire to destroy? Almost surely it is because he has some kind of unhappy feeling over which he has no control.

He may feel jealous. He may think that his parents or teachers love another child more, that someone has taken his place in their hearts. He takes out such feelings by tearing down that child's blocks, for instance. Part of the solution, then, lies in making him feel that he is loved, wanted, important. Praise him when he is not being destructive. Be his ally in helping him overcome his destructive impulses; do not be the enemy who scolds and punishes when he needs help.

He may feel helpless, unable to do the things he wants. If he feels that his mother or father stands in the way of his desires, he may attempt to get back at them by destroying their possessions. Part of the solution lies in making only those restrictions which are necessary and presenting those in a kindly, reasonable fashion.

If, through a lack of skill, he finds he is unable to do something, he will sometimes take it out on the object that represents his own failure. Painting a picture, for example, he may make a mistake. He then destroys it by smearing the whole sheet of paper and perhaps a few extra sheets for good measure. It may help to give him a little subtle guidance and encouragement when he attempts something new. Give him things which he can manage easily—not toys beyond his ability. Let him be his age—(or younger)—and don't expect too much of him. Many children become de-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

structive out of despair over the hopelessness of trying to do things as well as an older child or adult.

He may not be able to make friends easily. Playing with other children is difficult. To "get even" with them he breaks their toys. One way to solve this is to give him a chance to play with others more often, under the happiest circumstances, so that he will begin to enjoy their companionship. Try to figure out *why* he does not get on well with other children and do whatever possible to help him build happy relations. He will then want to do things *with* them instead of *against* them.

He may not have the kinds of playthings which will keep him interested and happy. He may be bored. He pounds the living room table with an ashtray because he does not have toys of his own that *can* be pounded. He needs more chance to play *his* way with *his* things. Let him have at least some materials which he can destroy freely—paper, plasticene, pieces of wood,—and if he is becoming destructive, try to direct his play to these things. Plasticene is especially good for averting a spree of breakage. Or give him a half hour in the bathroom with cups and toys suitable for pouring water back and forth.

Strong Feelings May Underlie Destructiveness

Sometimes it seems as if he *wanted* to be punished, and did naughty things deliberately in order to bring punishment on himself. Psychologically this is true. He may fear punishment and try being naughty as a test to see if his fears are justified. Therefore if he is punished, he will then be only all the *more* likely to try it out again, to reassure himself against this fear. If this fear is part of his problem, then it is especially important to *avoid* punishment.

He may feel that all broken or worn things are "bad" things. Children are quite likely to think this. They sometimes carry the idea further and think "I broke it, therefore I am bad." So when he sees a partly broken thing he may in some way think he is responsible for its "badness." He then destroys it completely to get it out of the way so that he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

will no longer be reminded of his "badness." Here again it is important to *avoid* punishment since he is already suffering from too much guilty feeling.

Sometimes a child seems to destroy things chiefly in order "to get attention." If so, it's time to ask—why? Does he get attention only when he is being bad? What is lacking in his experience that he goes to such extremes? Perhaps it means that he is not getting enough of *the right kind* of attention at other times. Try giving him more—try to find the kind that really satisfies.

These are but a few of the many reasons behind a child's destructiveness. They are enough to underline the need to find out why the child has this tendency. Then, and only then, can the parent or teacher get at the *root* of the trouble instead of merely dabbling with the symptoms.

There is one other point to remember. Destroying things can be fun. Sometimes there is pure pleasure in destruction. Ripping apart, knocking down, tearing up, squashing something flat or smashing something into a thousand pieces—this is *fun*. It seems to satisfy some deep pent-up feeling within us. Adults experience this as well as children. Therefore, if in an occasional exuberant and uncontrolled moment a child goes to excess in his destructiveness, put it down to one more of the vagaries of human nature, and do not be concerned that he is growing up into some kind of hoodlum.

Suggestions for Handling Particular Acts of Destruction

If he . . . . . .

Crumples his father's newspaper (especially if he's 2 or under)

Try –

Giving him some paper of his own which he can tear up to his heart's content.

If he . . . . . .

Tears up his own books

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Try –

Giving him durable cloth books if he is very young. When he is slightly older, give him other things to tear.

If he . . . . . .

Goes artistic with your lipstick and cold cream

Try –

Giving him more chance to play with messy things. Let him dabble in water, make mud pies, play with paint and clay or try his hand at finger painting.

If he . . . . . .

Pulls books and bric-a-brac off the shelves or gets into drawers

Try –

Giving him shelves and drawers of his own where he may keep his things. See that he has more things that he can delight in knowing are "his."

If he . . . . . .

Crashes things to the floor by pulling at things he cannot reach

Try –

Satisfying his curiosity whenever possible by lifting him up to peek into things, by letting him handle and touch and play with a lot of different kinds of objects.

If he . . . . . .

Draws on the walls

Try –

Presenting him with one wall of his own to draw on, if possible. Or tack large sheets of paper or a piece of beaver board on the wall or door. Have his drawings displayed in a convenient space.

If he . . . . . .

Pounds the furniture

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Try –

Giving him other things to pound. He'll enjoy simple tools as soon as he is able to handle them.

If he . . . . . .

Gets into your work basket and cuts up the mending he finds there

Try –

Giving him blunt scissors of his own and paper and cloth to cut.

If he . . . . . .

Turns your pocketbook upside down on every possible occasion

Try –

Giving him a pocketbook of his own to carry around –a discarded one of his mother's is often a great favorite.

If he . . . . . .

Seems to delight in all ripping and tearing and breaking

Try –

Letting him help with mending and repairing. Give him things which can be taken apart and put together, such as discarded household gadgets, things which fit into each other, things which can be screwed and unscrewed.

If he . . . . . .

Loves messes (or even if he doesn't–)

Try –

Letting him play with messy things. Let him dabble in water to his heart's content. Give him sand and clay and mud and paints. You might even try turning him loose with a jar of cold cream on the back porch once or twice. Of course, be sure he is dressed in old clothes or his regular clothes well covered. And adult supervision is usually necessary for the messier items.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

To Prevent Destructiveness, Accidental or Intentional

- Expect it. You wouldn't like your child to be *too* careful. In fact you would be distressed if he were. Because the too careful child is an emotionally disturbed child and will need help on other problems.
- If you see signs that his play is becoming too wild, try to prevent a crisis. A quiet few minutes of story telling may work wonders. Or play with him with clay or paper-cutting. Distract him from the situation in which he is becoming frantic. Fifteen minutes of prevention may save three hours of repair.
- Look into the situation and find some of the reasons. If the child lacks toys, space or outdoor activity, give him more freedom. If the child is wilfully destructive, see whether it occurs under certain conditions or with certain people. This will give you a clue to its causes. If, for instance, he tears up his younger sister's books, you might find he does it because he is jealous of her. In that case you will know that rather than scolding or asking him to apologize, the very opposite treatment—more love and attention—is the better way to approach the problem.
- Teach him, patiently, affectionately, the things he may not do. Be kind about it, but consistent. You will have to repeat many times. Say "This is mine. You may not spoil it. This is yours. You may do anything you wish with it." You do this not only to protect your things but to help him. He really is more comfortable when he knows that there are definite limits beyond which he cannot go.
- Avoid nagging, scolding, punishing, preaching. Instead teach him how to direct his energy into happier channels.
- Find more things to do together—things that will be fun for both of you.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Uses Bad Language

ANYONE'S child is bound, at some time or other, to pick up words and phrases that horrify adults. The range of these words used by children is broad enough to include the dirty, the blasphemous and the vulgar. Unflattering names are frequent—such as "skunk," "louse," "pig," "dope," "rat," "stinker," "stupid." Along with relatively mild adjectives like "silly," "dirty," "nasty," parents may suddenly hear the even more taboo four letter words. There may be toilet and sex talk, insulting comments on race or religion, or hostile expressions such as the simple flat statement "I don't like you," "I'll kill you," "I'll shoot you," "I'll cut you up and eat you," or "I'll flush you down the toilet."

"How do my children pick up such talk? Why do they say such things?" parents want to know. There are many answers to these questions.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

First and foremost, it is important to know that *any* child, from *any* background, can at times produce a shockingly colorful vocabulary. The child does not have to hear objectionable words more than once to remember and use them. Whether he hears them from an adult or another child, he senses immediately that they are in some way "special" and therefore more potent than other words. So when he wants to achieve a special effect he repeats what he has heard, almost parrot-like, even when he has little understanding of its real meaning.

Bad Language Has More Meaning for Adults

His reasons for using the words are sometimes obvious, sometimes obscure. Often "he only does it to annoy because he knows it teases." On the other hand, he may merely be trying out a new word quite innocently. Or using it may be his idea of a joke.

When a child is unable to achieve something he wants very much he usually becomes angry. He may let off steam either in physical actions or in words. He may hit, push or kick the most convenient object or the nearest person, or he may use some such phrase as "I'll kill you." (Often he chooses to direct such words at someone he loves and trusts.) This is just his way of saying "I'm mad" or "I want you out of my way."

But how many of us stop to figure out the child's use of bad language from the *child's* point of view? Often we don't because our own thoughts and feelings get in the way. Here are some reasons why:

- our feelings are hurt—we think of the child's words as a personal attack.
- we think the child knows the real meaning of the words.
- we are embarrassed, especially if we are the parents, because we are afraid others will think the child's language a reflection of what he hears at home.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

What to Do

What to do? Relax. Don't worry. You can say to yourself quite truthfully, "This hurts me more than it hurts him." These words do not harm the child; this need not be the beginning of a bad habit; it is simply a phase which most children go through.

By understanding, by being relaxed and unworried, by not being shocked or alarmed—just this and nothing more—you have gone 90% of the way in handling the problem. And with a calm, unruffled attitude, you'll find yourself almost automatically carrying out the following suggestions.

You will not scold or punish the child for bad words because you'll understand that he's not being bad. You'll try to have a sense of humor about them even though sometimes you may be completely fed up. You'll avoid acting in such a way as to emphasize the importance of the words in his mind.

Acting on this principle further, you may decide to use the same words back to him in a calm, unemotional way in order to make the word seem less important to him. Or if he's old enough to understand and respect a request, this may work: Ask him in a firm but pleasant manner not to use the word again; or say "We're tired of hearing that now," or "We're all through with that now;" or tell him "Though we don't mind it at home, some people think little children should not use words like that."

If a word or phrase of religious or racial prejudice is used there is the temptation, in view of its serious social implications, to deal with it differently. But the child is too young for a lecture on tolerance. He'll give up the word more easily if the situation is handled casually. Ask him not to use the word, or name because it hurts the feelings of others.

Sometimes you might try playing with the word For instance, if he says "lousy," you say "bowsy, dowzy, rowzy," until the word loses its original significance.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Make a game of rhyming. All children should have some word-play. It is their way of enjoying language.

Show them how to coin new words, or give them long, hard words as substitutes. One teacher suggested "whopple-jawed" and "Czechoslovakia" as substitutes for certain objectionable words and the children were delighted. Sometimes a simple substitute will do, like "shucks." With older children (4 and 5), try some high-sounding phrase like "unmitigated prevaricator," or a jaw-breaker like "prestidigitator" or make up alliterations like "crink-crink" and "blip-blop." Ask your friends what their children have enjoyed.

No one method will always work. For instance, sometimes if the situation strikes you as funny, it is a good idea to let yourself laugh—this may take the sting out and the child may lose interest in such talk. But in another situation laughing may increase the importance of the word to the child and he may repeat it trying to get a similar reaction again. You will need to experiment with different methods.

You will handle it differently, depending on whether the child is using bad language to express anger or merely to tease. If he is teasing, sometimes it is because he is bored and he needs more interesting things to do, more activity. If he is angry, remember that to express his anger in words instead of actions is a step forward—even though he may not use the words you would select for him. When he was little, his principal way of expressing angry feelings was to bite or hit or throw. Now he can put his feelings into words. Be glad he has reached this next stage in his development. You would not want him to remain inarticulate all his life!

In a Nursery Group the Situation is a Little Different

In a group of children a slightly different situation arises but the manner of handling is much the same. If several young children are shouting or chanting objectionable words, you can show them by withdrawing that you are not interested in that kind of fun. If you hear just one

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

child using the words among a group of children, you can ask him, if he is old enough (say over 4 or 5), to stop on the basis that "Many people don't like those words and so we don't want to start using them here."

The nursery school teacher is sometimes put to it to know what to do when a wave of bad language sweeps through her group. Her own behavior is calm and unemotional. But the children get enough reaction from the other children and from adults on the outside so that they have sufficient incentive to continue this form of activity. She herself may not regard it as serious but she knows that she is criticized by parents.

There is no cure-all. The teacher will have to use all the usual common sense methods and pay special attention to which methods seem most effective with which children. She will use distraction, suggestion, non-participation, word and sound-play. She will not use scolding, shaming or other punishment.

Learning more about the child's background may give her new ideas about why he does it and how to divert him. It is often a good plan to discuss the problem with the parents. Sometimes they feel guilty and upset because they know the child has picked up his bad language at home. They may need reassurance about how natural it is and that almost all children do it. Trying to convey a new point of view to parents may be a long and difficult process but a very helpful one. And be assured: the less direct attention paid to his objectionable words, the sooner he will outgrow his interest in them.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Won't Share

SELFISHNESS is as natural in little children as unselfishness is admirable in adults. Parents who are disappointed in finding their offspring minus that rare quality—generosity—forget that no child is born into the world generous, wanting to share his things and wait his turn.

Understanding and practicing unselfishness is a difficult, complicated process that takes many years of living to absorb. Parents, in an effort to start their children on the right path, hope to hand over this lesson of a lifetime to their youngster of two. But it just can't be done.

When a child is unwilling to share it is because he is unable to. He has to grow *with* the idea and *into* it if he is to achieve true generosity. Mere surface politeness does not come from the heart. To force an idea upon him before he is ready to receive it is to demand something of him which is not natural for his early age. As a result the future development of true unselfishness may be stunted.

The natural and deeprooted desire to possess is a good trait. The ability to share is based upon it. This is logical and reasonable when you stop to think of it, but so often overlooked. Before one can share a thing one must first own it. First comes an *apprenticeship* of owning, then the more difficult job of sharing.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

These Are the Steps to Sharing

Step No. 1

To his great delight and satisfaction the little child discovers what the word "mine" can mean. This sign of awareness of the world around him tells you he is no longer a baby. Things over which he has full control, which he owns and can do with as he pleases, develop his confidence and give him the sense of security which money in the bank may give his father. Things which he likes to feel he owns are not just limited to the toys which he can hold in his hands but include rhymes and songs he knows, a shelf in the closet, the slide in the playground. This natural and strong sense of ownership is a good characteristic upon which future unselfishness can be built.

Step No. 2

About the same time as step No. 1, he comes face to face with the unpleasant reality that some things are "not mine." While he finds that there are some things he may do with as he chooses, there are other objects which he cannot even touch and which other people may use exclusively. He has no idea why this complicated state of affairs should exist. He just knows that it does. In time, with more experience, he comes to understand which things are "mine" and which are "not mine."

Step No. 3

Shortly after steps No. 1 and 2, he finds that some of the "not mine" things are "his" or "hers," and that his little brothers and sisters and playmates have the sole right to play-things which he wants. He observes that objects which he has grouped together in one vast category of "not mine" have owners. He is beginning to connect things with the people to whom they belong. As he begins to feel that other children can be friends and as he learns to play with them, he will respect their rights to own. Until that time "owning"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and "sharing" will be the cause of constant friction in the nursery school and the playroom at home.

Step No. 4

He begins to learn the meaning of time. Up to this point time has consisted of "now" and "not now." Such phrases as "later," "in a few minutes," "next," "again," "after a while," "when Larry is finished playing with it" mean but one thing to him. It means "not now"—(perhaps "never")—until experience shows him to the contrary. This is the main reason why he is unable to take turns. He thinks his turn will never come. To him the idea of lending a plaything even for a moment means losing it.

Step No. 5

When he is more grown-up, when he begins to enjoy and value the friendship of other children, when he starts playing *with* them instead of alongside them, he sees that a possession can be "mine" and "yours" at the same time. He learns the meaning of "ours." He knows, at last, how to share.

He can let someone else share with him his enjoyment of his playthings because he no longer fears that they will be taken away. There is no longer a panicky need to hold on. He finds that sharing can win him friends and that the value of a possession can be increased when it is shared with another. He sees how giving can be fun.

Let Owning Grow Into Sharing

Unwillingness to share is natural in small children. When they say "I need it," they *mean* it. Once the adult sees this, ways to help the child will be more easily found. Then the child will reach the next stage—wanting, voluntarily, to share. The five steps of growth just described show how futile, as well as harmful, it may be if the parent or teacher attempts to break down the child's sense of ownership. It should not be destroyed; it is needed to build a more civilized trait—generosity.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Perhaps we might be less disturbed to see our children's non-sharing behavior if we stop to inquire into the reasons why *we* think it so important. Perhaps we are revealing our own regard for property. Perhaps our modern civilization has taught us (much too well) the material value of things. Therefore, when we see a child appropriating or unwilling to give up a piece of property we read into these acts our own adult theory of values. We need to remember, however, that the child knows nothing about intrinsic values—his concern is based solely on having, owning.

Helping Him to Learn to Share

- Let the child own things. Allow him the satisfaction of calling them "mine." (This may be especially important if he is a part of a large family.) These need not be expensive toys. Children find just as much delight in owning the simplest things.
- Let the child be the one to decide whether or not to give up his toy to his brother or sister or playmate. If you take his toy away to give to another child, you simply demonstrate in a vivid fashion that his things can be, and are taken away; that they are yours, not his.
- When a squabble begins to brew over the use of a possession, offer a substitute. Say to the child, "Let's see if we can't find something nice for Alice." When children play together, a few duplicate toys may simplify the situation.
- Respect his rights of private property. Don't ask a child to share his things when there is too much danger they might be broken or lost.
- Be very fair when you are called upon to arbitrate a dispute. Don't use "who had it first" as the only solution for all wrangling. Don't *always* take the guest child's side merely because he is company. Don't *always* "give way" to the smallest in the family or the newest in the group. Don't defend "girl versus boy."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

- Remember that learning to know and like other children comes before and is far more important than learning to share. Arrange things so that the child enjoys being with other children. In this way he will start sharing more quickly than if it becomes an issue in itself. Help him to see that playing in groups, using things together is fun, and that sharing and taking turns will add to the fun.
- Some children are ready to share sooner than others. If the child has great difficulty in sharing—more than the other children of his age—try to find the cause. Perhaps he needs more affection and attention. Perhaps he has never had the chance to really own. Perhaps he merely lacks experience in playing among other children. If you fill these needs, he'll be better able to share.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Still Sucks His Thumb

A CERTAIN little three-year-old sucks his thumb a hundred times a day. His mother, as she herself would tell you, has done everything she can think of to stop him. If you were to watch her a few hours, you would realize how troubled she is. She alternately reasons with the little boy, scolds him, threatens him. You hear her say, "You make me ashamed of you," or "I don't want a little *baby* around me," or "What will your Daddy think?" Sometimes she merely reminds him, or takes his thumb away from his mouth without saying anything. Other times she grabs him impatiently and gives the offending hand a resounding smack.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

At night she carefully ties both thumbs in a bulky woolen mitt.

Now this is a *good* mother, conscientious and well meaning. She dotes on her little boy. Indeed, if she cared less about him, she would not be so concerned over the thumbsucking. Without being quite aware of it, she regards her child's thumbsucking as a sign of failure on her part. She could also give you many reasons why she thinks that, for his sake, it is imperative to break the habit at once. What she has not yet learned is this important truth—that the chief danger of thumbsucking lies not in the habit itself but rather in the way parents and teachers handle it.

Thumbsucking Is Generally Harmless

Many mothers fear that thumb or finger sucking may be harmful. They feel duty-bound to stop a child from sucking his thumb or fingers because they believe it is babyish or improper and that unless halted, it may go on forever. They fear that it will injure the thumb, that it will carry germs to the mouth, that it will make a child introverted, that it will spoil the shape of the teeth and jaw.

There are no facts to justify these fears. Not only is concern needless, it is also unfortunate when it is translated into direct or immediate action in order to stop the thumbsucking. In such instances, the mother may unwittingly make the habit into a more serious problem.

Thumbsucking *can* affect the shape of the teeth and jaw but the effect is usually not permanent. It depends partly upon the way the sucking is done. If the child presses his thumb *hard* against the roof of the mouth or teeth, there is a possibility that the shape of the mouth will be altered, at least temporarily. However, since in most cases the jaws come back to normal position when the thumbsucking ceases, parents' concern is usually unnecessary.

Infants Have a Natural Need for Sucking

Because parents worry so much about thumbsucking, it is important to understand a little of why it happens and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

what it means both to the little baby and to the older child.

For the little baby, say up to six months or so, thumbsucking seems to be a sign that he is not getting as much sucking as he needs. Since sucking is one of the basic needs of infants, quite apart from its use as a means of getting food, the young infant who sucks his thumb is telling his mother that he is not getting enough sucking at the breast or bottle.

This has been revealed by research, particularly that of Dr. David M. Levy. He found that insufficient sucking in infancy can often be traced to one or a combination of the following:

- A free flowing breast, or a large hole in the nipple of the bottle which enables the baby to get enough milk before he has had enough sucking.
- Being taken away from the breast or bottle after a prescribed amount of time—say 12 or 15 minutes—before he has had enough sucking.
- Being put on a nursing schedule in which there are too few nursings during the day, or getting down to three meals a day at too young an age.

In his studies, Dr. Levy found that the majority of the babies and children who sucked their fingers or thumbs had had their sucking time during nursing cut down in one of these ways. Most of the babies who did *not* suck their thumbs had been allowed to nurse as long and as often as they wished. This is added proof that sucking for the infant has a purpose of its own aside from that of getting food.

Give the Infant Ample Sucking Time

All of this research indicates that allowing the young infant to have extra sucking time may prevent many cases of thumbsucking and decrease the severity, or shorten the time for other cases. But that is a fairly recent observation and not widely known, and authorities are not yet in con-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

plete agreement as to just how effective it is in prevention. However, it is certainly worth trying. Allow the infant plenty of time at breast or bottle, and do not be in a hurry to cut down the number of feedings per day.

If he begins to suck his thumb, increase his daily sucking time. For instance, make the hole in the nipple smaller so that it will take him at least 20 minutes to finish the bottle, or if breast-fed, let him nurse as long as he wishes. Watch particularly the very young infant of a month or two. He may not yet be able to get his thumb in his mouth. But if he seems to be trying, it is probably a sign that he needs more opportunity for sucking. This is an important time at which to satisfy his need.

Babies differ widely in the strength of their sucking urge. Some apparently need to do a great deal of sucking. With others, their sucking urge seems easily satisfied, and they never put finger to mouth, even in early infancy. Perhaps you have carried out all of the above recommendations and your baby still sucks his thumb. This does not necessarily mean that the theory is all wrong. It is quite possible that he will give up his sucking earlier or not do as much thumbsucking as he would if you had neglected his sucking needs.

Thumbsucking Satisfies Other Needs for the Older Child

For the older baby and the young child, thumbsucking seems to have a rather different meaning. It is no longer just a sign of insufficient sucking, but has become a sort of *comforter*. It is now more of a habit in the old fashioned sense to which the child turns when he wants a little comforting. When he feels that he is not loved enough, not safe enough, not good enough, he resorts to his earlier satisfaction. The act of sucking his thumb comforts and assures him. It is a natural impulse which he does without reasoning.

Children practically always give up thumbsucking by the time they are five or six years old whether it has been a constant target for correction, or whether there has been

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

no effort on the part of the parents. For one thing their contact with children of the same age or older makes them want to give it up as a matter of pride. By school age it is clearly not a social asset among their playmates. Also, as they grow up and become more outgoing they have less need to cling to babyish comforts.

Thumbsucking Conveys a Message

The child who constantly sucks his thumb is (without realizing it, of course) telling the world that he's not quite satisfied with certain things about life. There's a little something missing which he needs. He's telling this to his mother just as the infant, by his cry, is telling her that he is hungry or cold. To ask, to plead, to force the child to give up thumbsucking does not get to the bottom of the problem. It's like asking a child to stop crying when he is cold instead of giving him a blanket.

Furthermore, to put pressure on the child to forsake his thumbsucking only serves to add new tension to his already distressed frame of mind, and may even increase the amount of thumbsucking. He may feel that here is just one more satisfaction taken away. Other signs of tension such as sucking his tongue may crop up, as a result.

In many cases, it seems that the parents' constant efforts to correct it only prolong the habit. And some authorities think that the reverse is also true—that is—if a child is allowed to suck his thumb all he wishes, he will give up thumbsucking sooner than if urged to stop it.

There are, of course, many different degrees of thumbsucking. There is the youngster who sucks his thumb or fingers for a few minutes at night before he goes to sleep, or whenever he is sleepy in the daytime, or when he is tired or hungry or feeling frustrated. This is so natural and so commonplace and so completely lacking in significance that you need not give it a second thought.

But occasionally one sees a child who sucks almost constantly, who would rather suck than eat, and who indeed may sit through an entire meal absorbed in his sucking and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

not eating. This youngster is certainly saying that things are not right with his world and that he needs help in finding more constructive satisfactions.

Then there is also the little one who has given up thumbsucking but suddenly starts it up again. Observation will almost always show that something has happened to upset his equilibrium. What he needs is not a direct attack on his thumbsucking but some ironing out of whatever difficulties are causing him to resort to the comfort of his thumb again.

Ways of Handling Thumbsucking—A Point of View

Parents whose children suck their thumbs will need to be prepared for the criticism of other parents, or perhaps relatives. This is embarrassing, and sometimes irritating. But one needs to develop a point of view. True, any of us would *prefer* that our child not be a thumbsucker. But try to keep in mind that it is not really very important, that he *will* grow out of it, that he is not doing it just out of wilfulness but out of a need. Try not to let yourself be drawn into nagging or punishing or any other unwise direct attack on the problem just because someone else thinks you should make the child stop.

The Do Not's

- Do not use force to restrain the child in any way. Even in the earliest months do not tie or bind his hands so he cannot reach his mouth. Do not use mits or thumbguards of any kind, nor elbow splints nor anything to keep his arm from bending. Avoid the kind of sleeping garment that holds his arms down. Do not put bitter or disagreeable substances on his fingers, or commercial preparations which are supposed to stop thumbsucking.
- Do not punish. Do not scold, wheedle, coax, "remind" constantly, nor threaten that he will injure his fingers or make his teeth crooked. Avoid bribes or rewards or the "gold star" technique. Do not say "If you love me

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

you'll stop," "You're a big boy now," "Aren't you ashamed to be such a baby," or use any similar incentives or threats.

The Do's

The "Do Not's" are nice and specific. The "Do's" are much more general. They require looking at the child's life as a whole and trying to provide all the essentials of a happy childhood.

- *With the young baby*—provide longer and more frequent sucking periods. Make the hole in the nipple smaller, or if breast fed let him nurse as long as he wishes. Postpone weaning. Try using a pacifier or a rubber nipple stuffed with cotton.
- *With the older baby*—make sure he is not sucking his thumb just because he is bored. Is he kept in a playpen too long? Does he have enough toys, enough stimulation?
- *With the child of two, three or four*—notice when he sucks. If it is only occasionally, forget about it. If it is when he is lonely, frightened, feels deserted, try to provide more satisfactions and greater security.
- *With the child of five or six*—if he seems to be trying to overcome the habit himself, discuss it with him. Encourage him. Assure him that he will get over it.
- *With any child any age*—look at his life as a whole. See if you can't find the root of the problem. Does he have too much of some things, too little of others? Too much excitement, too little? Too many companions, too few? Too much mothering, too little? Always try to notice the kinds of situations which seem to bring on thumbsucking. Is it when he feels left out of things? When he can't keep up with older children? When his little sister gets more than her share of attention? These may tell you what is really troubling him and what lies at the bottom of his thumbsucking.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Here, then, are some of the more important points to be kept in mind about thumbsucking:

- It is rarely as important as parents fear.
- Children usually outgrow it by five or six years.
- If it is indulged in only occasionally or briefly, do not be concerned at all.
- If it is persistent or excessive it is a sign of unsatisfied needs.
  - . . . With the young infant, it usually means that he is not getting enough sucking.
  - . . . With the older baby and child, it is a sign that some of his other needs are not being met and he is using his thumb as a comforter.
- Avoid all drastic measures and direct attacks on the thumbsucking.
- Try instead to see that he has as many as possible of the essentials for a full, happy, comfortable life.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Still Wets

YOU can scarcely blame a mother for being upset if her child is still wetting himself long months after she thinks he should be dry. For one thing there is the nuisance of extra laundry. Also she hesitates to let him go places, such as visiting, or to nursery school, until he is dry. But even more important than these appears to be her *embarrassment* because her child is showing up at a disadvantage.

It is part of our cultural pattern to feel proud when a child does things early for his age. The child who learns to use the toilet at an early age is thought of as a "good" child and reflects credit on both himself and his parents. "I shouldn't boast," a mother will say, unable to keep the pride out of her voice, "but Mary Lou has been dry since before she was fifteen months old." By the same token, parents are worried or ashamed when their children are slow in learning toilet control or if, having once learned, they suddenly return to wetting again.

In the last decade or two, many of us have been placing too much emphasis on early toilet training. Perhaps that is part of the speed-up in tempo of living which we are seeing everywhere. Actually many children in this country would be better off if adults were less concerned about their toilet training. Indeed our very word "training" is unfortunate because it indicates that "training" is something which parents do *to* a child. In reality, achieving control of his elimination should be something which a child is permitted

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

to *learn for himself* with some helpful direction from the parents, but without any coercion.

However, since "training" is the accepted word and there is no other well-understood term to express what happens, we shall use it here—keeping in mind the warning that "training" can be a dangerous idea if it is permitted to mean "to impose a set of rules." Here we want it to mean "to help to develop."

This pamphlet deals with "the child who *still* wets," which means the child who is past the "training" age. It happens, however, that unfortunate training methods account for so many of the cases of persistent wetting that it is necessary to examine some ideas about training in order to understand wetting.

"Training" Begins When the Child is Ready for it

Some authorities think it is best to put off training until the child is around two years old—and by that age he will practically train himself. By then he can easily retain his urine for several hours at a time; he gets some warning of a full bladder or a bowel movement, and knows how to hold them back if necessary.

Perhaps more important, he has reached an age when he is eager to imitate his parents and older brothers and sisters. If he has a chance to see them using the bathroom he will want to do it too, and has enough control to manage it successfully. Sometimes with this method of "self-training" the child will become completely trained within a few days, and without the slightest effort. Some observers think that children who are allowed to get the idea themselves in their own way become dry at an earlier age than children who are taught.

But some mothers feel they cannot wait this long. And authorities do not specify a precise age at which to begin, or any best method. However, they do now agree that it is important not to begin bowel training *at least until the infant is able to sit up steadily.* Most of them would say not to try to teach control until the baby gives some signs that he is

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ready to begin, such as by grunting and making noises, wriggling, acting restless, clutching at his genitals, or otherwise making his wants known. This is likely to occur sometime between 8 and 15 months for bowel movements, or a few months later for urination. You do not rush the child into learning to stand or walk before his body has developed to the point where standing and walking come naturally. In somewhat the same way, you wait for the right "physiological maturation" before trying to teach toilet control.

The very young child who is placed on the toilet too often does not achieve the voluntary control which he appears to achieve. As is frequently said, "It is the mother who is trained, not the child." What appears to be control is only mechanical action. Because the child has no real understanding, he is easily thrown off his training later. Also, the insistence on training gets him to feeling balky and makes him want to go against his parents' wishes instead of wanting to do what they want him to do. This makes for bad relations between the parents and the child, and will show up in other clashes of will.

Early Training May Be the Cause of Wetting Problems Later On

It is now well understood that too early training, too much training, or too strict and severe training may be one of the major causes of wetting that persists or that begins again after the training period has ended. To shame, punish, threaten, bribe or reward a child for behavior on the toilet is to exert high pressure methods which may cause wetting at a future date, especially if other things are troubling him at that time. It is much better to take things easy. Don't rush. A few extra weeks of diaper washing when the child is one and two may save months of panty and sheet washing when he is three, four and five.

It is important to keep in mind what toilet training is like from the young child's angle. To him urine and faeces are not yet objects of disgust and to withhold them for a particular time or place is not natural. However, since it is

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

requested, he tries to please. But in order to carry out this difficult new idea, he must first set in motion a complicated machinery which involves both his mind and his muscles. To demand too much of him when he has neither skill nor understanding will undermine the first beginnings of his newly developing self-confidence.

Some of the mistakes to be avoided in toilet training are:

- starting too early
- taking the child to the toilet too often, or keeping him sitting there too long
- trying to establish a rigid toilet schedule
- making the whole thing seem too important

If your child is now three or four or five, many of these mistakes are already a part of the past as far as you are concerned. However, an understanding of these points may give you some of the explanations for your present problems. Don't worry about past mistakes. They've been made by countless other mothers, often on good "authority." There is still a lot you can do to help your child with his problem.

Some Children Are Dry Later Than Others

If one says that a child "still" wets, what is meant by "still"? That is, how old should a child be before he is considered "too old" to wet? In this area, mistakes are likely to be made in the direction of expecting too much of the child. It is practically impossible to say when any one child "should" be dry—and perhaps it is just as well not to try.

Children differ in this as they do in every other characteristic. Some achieve it without effort many months before others. Some children are dry in the daytime by their second birthday but this is exceptional. If it happens, well and good; but it is by no means a goal to be aimed at. Some children are dry both night and day by their third birthday

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

though occasional night wetting usually lasts until three and a half. After three, and even four years, though, there are bound to be accidents—times when there are temporary breakdowns of control.

Persistent wetting beyond the age when most children have learned control is called enuresis. It can refer either to wetting which has never ceased, or to wetting that occurs after the child has achieved control. Although the deep, psychological reasons for these two kinds of reaction may differ, in general the over-all handling which parents need to understand is more or less the same for both.

Though enuresis is rarely due to physical reasons, a check-up by the doctor is often advisable. There should always be an examination of the urine if enuresis persists.

What to Do When Wetting Is a Problem

The mistakes of early training have already been discussed. There are more points of the same kind to be kept in mind in the handling of the 3, 4 and 5 year old child.

- Don't make an issue of toilet control. It is only one of the many things children must learn.
- Don't use threats, shaming, rewards, punishment as a means of training.
- Don't bribe the child with candy or a special treat for good behavior.
- Don't demand that he tell you in words that he wants to go to the toilet.
- Don't give him the idea you'll love him more when he stops wetting. Never say, "If you loved me, you would" or the opposite, "Aren't you ashamed to be such a baby?"
- Try giving him a little extra to drink in the mornings and early afternoons so that his body will contain extra fluid and he will not be thirsty. Then give him a little less to drink in the late afternoon and early evening. But

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

do not carry this to extreme nor expect it to be a cure-all. It may help a little with some children.

- Don't show your annoyance if you can help it. Better still, try not to feel annoyance. Even with the 4 and 5 year old, regard wetting as a not unusual reaction to something that has gone wrong in the child's life. It is a sign that the child needs your help.

Try to be casual. Give him more assurance. Show him that you know he will do better some day. (*He will!*) Give him more affection and praise. Help him to develop his skills, to grow in independence and self-confidence.

Following these suggestions may not make your child dry right away, but it should help him to be happier, more relaxed and outgoing. And the happy, relaxed child is likely to achieve dryness a good deal earlier than the tense, high-strung child.

Accidents Are to Be Expected

When a child who is dry most of the time wets himself, it is often referred to as an "accident." Actually "incident" may be a better word, because an "accident" usually refers to something which is unexpected and unfortunate. An occasional wetting in the 3 and 4 year old is entirely normal and is therefore to be expected. The only thing unexpected about it is the exact moment at which it occurs.

Treat these slip-ups casually; never scold. It may help you if you recognize that these things happen most often when the child is excited or upset, or when he has played too long, or is in strange surroundings. If the child is inclined to worry about his "incidents," it may be necessary to assure him that he has done nothing to be ashamed of, and that all little boys and girls have that happen once in a while.

The Child's Uneasiness May Be the Cause of Wetting

A small child has so much to learn, so many things to attempt! When too much is expected from him by adults,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

his troubles start piling up. He becomes worried and upset. He feels unable to juggle all the things expected of him so he drops one; that one is often urinary control.

Parents know and recognize that certain things—such as excitement—will bring on wetting. There are a number of other causes, though, that are not ordinarily associated with the problem. These are such things as being expected to achieve too much in good behavior, manners and the like; finding things in his home at sixes and sevens; having too many people asking him to do this, do that; being with relatives who don't understand children; a new baby sister or brother whose presence makes him jealous; sickness which keeps him in bed or indoors for a length of time; moving to or visiting another house; going to a new school—any change in the normal routine of things.

Help Him to Want Control

There may be other deeper reasons for his trouble. For instance, sometimes when relations between a child and his parents have got off to a bad start, the child seems to use the enuresis as a "weapon" against the parents, "to get even" with them for some of the bad feelings he has inside. Or the enuresis may seem to be part of a pattern of stubbornness.

If the parents sense this attitude, the important thing to understand is that they must not in turn try "to get even" with the child. Tit-for-tat behavior never solved anything. They may think he could control himself if he wanted to—and in a sense that may be true. But then the thing is not to *make* him control, but to *help him want to control.* Remember that a child would rather have his parents' approval than their disapproval even though occasionally the opposite may seem true for a short time.

If a child has been dry for a while and then starts to wet again, do not pay too much attention to the wetting itself. Try instead to analyze the child's total life situation and improve things for him as much as possible.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

His Ideas About Urination May Be Confused

Children are often mixed-up as to the difference in the functions of the sex and eliminative organs since they are near each other. If a child has feelings of shame or secretiveness concerning sexual matters, he is likely, due to his confusion, to transfer some of these feelings to the eliminative functions.

A casual, matter-of-fact attitude is the best way to help clear up this confusion. When a little girl, for instance, stands in front of the toilet and tries to urinate "like Daddy" or her brother, don't be shocked. Most little girls try this at some time. Don't scold her for wetting the floor. Instead use this as the logical time to give her one of her first lessons in sex education. Explain to her that boys and men have a penis, so they stand up; all girls and women have a vagina so they sit down.

Some little children have fears connected with going to the toilet. For instance, a child may be afraid of being flushed down the toilet. (He should be given a potty or a child's seat over a pot.) Such fears cannot simply be laughed off since they are very real to the child. They call for soothing and reassurance.

Children like to make jokes and play games that deal with the toilet. This is a harmless and natural interest which they should be allowed to express. In fact, when a child seems unduly concerned with the function of elimination, encouraging such play can give him a needed outlet. For instance, give him a toy potty or join in when he plays doctor or nurse. Of course, it is wise to explain to him which of these games or jokes may be frowned upon by the conventions of the outside world.

Further Suggestions

When a child insists upon performing toilet in public or watching others at the toilet, treat the matter calmly with some remark such as, "It is not clean to urinate in the yard" or "People like to be alone."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Of the many words taught children to express urine and urinate, bowel movement and defecate, the best ones are probably those especially coined for the purpose (such as "wee-wee," or "B.M.") Words that have another meaning in ordinary conversation (such as "duty," "business," "try," "go," "number two") are better dropped. The child may retain their toilet meaning when he is grown up and avoid their use in conversation because of an embarrassing association.

Most nursery schools handle the wetting problem well. They take wetting incidents in their stride and make nothing of them. But if you find that your child's school makes an issue of the matter in training your child, it may be well to consider removing him from the school until a time when wetting is no longer a problem.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Masturbates

THE very word "masturbation" makes some people feel like blushing. To many of us it brings to mind furtiveness, shame, distaste or danger. For hundreds of years masturbation has been pictured as a shocking, harmful habit leading to disastrous consequences. As a result many parents are quite naturally disturbed when they find that *their* child masturbates.

Surrounding this whole subject there exist some dangerous untruths which, believed by thousands of people, have caused vast harm to children and unhappiness to their parents. To give little boys and girls the best kind of childhood, parents must know the truth about masturbation. They must have the *facts*.

To approach the subject soundly one must first throw out many of the ideas that have accumulated through the ages, ideas which even some books on medicine and child care have helped to spread.

These Are the Facts

Let's get rid of the untruths first . . .

- Masturbation will not injure people's bodies or make them unable to marry.
- It will not cause them to "go crazy."
- It is not something perverted or to be looked upon with shock or horror.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

And now here are the important truths . . .

- All little children do a certain amount of masturbation. In its milder forms, masturbation is not serious and is to be expected.
- Brief or occasional masturbation should cause no concern whatsoever. When it is indulged in excessively, it indicates that the child is tense or worried about something and it therefore becomes necessary to find the cause of his tension.
- It is not the *habit* which is serious or harmful but the *worry and anxiety* it causes to both parents and children.
- Masturbation is not a *cause* of other problems but it can be a *symptom* that other things are wrong in the child's life. When it is excessive it is a signal of emotional distress.

It is Natural for Young Children to Handle Their Genitals

A child may, with no intent to stimulate the genitals (sex organs), pluck at his clothing if it is too tight, or touch the genitals when he wants to go to the toilet but this is not considered masturbation. Masturbation is the touching or handling of the genitals purposely for the sensation it creates.

Little children are natural explorers. They learn about a new world by feeling and touching new things. Sex is no exception. A child has a healthy curiosity and is interested in exploring all parts of his body (and other peoples' too). He sticks his finger into his navel and his nose and his mouth, and experiments with his toes and fingers. When by chance he touches his genitals and finds that this produces a sensation he is likely to repeat it. To him this is in a class with other sensations derived from the sense of touch—sucking his thumb, twisting a lock of hair, carressing a soft piece of silk or a woolly toy animal.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When Parents Are Upset and Anxious . . .

To adults it is sometimes a shock to realize that a little child does have sexual feelings and that by touching himself he derives a mild form of sexual pleasure. Parents fear that a child who shows sexual feelings early in life may grow up to be too strongly sexed or in some way abnormal. Actually a moderate amount of handling the sex organs is normal and will be found in all children. The feeling in the genitals is one of the many kinds of sensations which the body gives, a sensation which the child naturally wishes to explore and to enjoy occasionally. Small amounts of masturbation, therefore, can and should be ignored; it is only frequent or excessive masturbation which requires special attention for the sake of the child's well-being.

Perhaps you are one of the many adults who have believed, all your life—ever since *you* were a child—that masturbation is unhealthy, shameful, bad, etc. If so, you are bound to feel troubled when you discover that your child masturbates. Your natural reaction is to try to put a stop to it immediately by the most direct means. But immediate, direct action may have the very opposite result from that which you hope to achieve. You may find that the masturbation has increased or that other seemingly unrelated problems have sprung up.

So, in order to help your child, the very first thing to do is to stop worrying about masturbation. Keep in mind this well established fact: some handling of the sex organs is completely normal and to be expected. *All children do it.*

. . . The Child's Problems Increase

When you have overcome your own disturbance concerning this part of children's behavior, you will be better able to avoid the mistake so often made by adults. That mistake is to let the child know you think he is doing something bad.

To the small child, *to do something bad* is the same as

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

if *he himself* were bad. When he feels he is a bad person he feels guilty. This, in turn, makes him begin to fear that his parents do not love him because of his "badness." Then he starts worrying because to him the love of his parents is the most important, the most necessary thing in his whole world. He could not exist without it. His happiness and his very life depend on their taking care of him—and they will take care of him only if they love him. To lose their love would be the worst thing that could happen to him. The fear of losing love is the root of anxiety.

These emotions—guilt, fear and anxiety—spell trouble. They are the basis for the child's worries. They are the underlying cause of many behavior problems of childhood and may lead to unwholesome, unhappy attitudes in adult life. They may be the causes, too, of other problems such as nightmares, temper tantrums, aggressive behavior and habits such as bedwetting and thumbsucking at a later age. They are also at least partly responsible for the ingoing, introverted personality for which masturbation is sometimes mistakenly blamed.

Therefore, if a child's parents show directly or indirectly that they think masturbation is bad, they only increase the child's problems. Disapproval, scolding or punishment intensify the child's guilty and fearful feelings. It may happen that the more he is forced to think about masturbation, the harder it is for him to refrain. A vicious circle is set up. The more he masturbates the more he worries; and then the worry causes still more masturbation. Threats may possibly make him stop (they probably won't) but even if they *appear* to be "successful," they are likely to stir up other anxieties.

These Are Good Ways to Approach the Problem

- Give the child every assurance that he is both safe from harm and a good child.
- Avoid words, attitudes or actions that might make the child afraid or ashamed.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

- Give praise and affection at special times, such as when he is going to bed, or has been disappointed or has had trouble with other children.
- See that he gets plenty of opportunity for happy relations with his playmates as well as activities which capture his wholehearted interest. If he shows any strong interests let him pursue them.
- Answer his questions, both the ones he asks and those which are obviously troubling him but which he cannot express.
- Let children of the opposite sex see each other when undressed. However young a child may be—two or three or four—he should be given an explanation when he shows interest or puzzlement over the sex differences. Tell him in a casual, matter-of-fact tone: boys and men have a penis, girls and women have a vagina.
- Answer his questions about babies in a way he can understand. If his natural curiosity is satisfied at each stage of his development, he will be more likely to have a normal, healthy attitude towards sex and avoid some of the pitfalls of anxiety and fear and confusion so often associated with the subject.

Punishment Is Unwise

Any kind of punishment either by means of words or force, or even mild reprimands on the subject, is extremely unwise. The chief danger of punishment is that it makes the child feel guilty—that he is bad, naughty. The child is likely to have a stronger feeling of guilt about this activity than about the other things he does. His ideas are vague and confused and his imagination vivid. He may build up pictures of the terrible things that will happen to him because of his naughtiness, thus sowing the seeds of more fears and more anxiety, and increasing his emotional difficulties.

Another reason for avoiding punishment is that it may

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

play upon and confirm the fear which he may already have to some degree, that is, fear of injury to his genitals. Many children do worry for fear their genitals are impaired in some way or that something is lacking. When children first become aware of the differences in the sexes, they are likely to experience some anxious moments.

A little girl, for instance, frequently asks why she doesn't have a penis like her little brother and in playing games may show her wish to have one. Girls often assume they have been injured or that there is something wrong, missing or unfinished about themselves. Boys often have similar thoughts when they see little girls and consequently may fear that the same thing will happen to them.

Punishment for masturbation, therefore, only increases their fears. What they need is the exact opposite: reassurance. Masturbation is less likely to cause anxiety if children get the right kind of reassurance than if they are punished.

Threats Are Punishment Too

People often think that "to punish" a child means to do something to him physically and that merely "threatening" him with punishment is not punishment itself. Actually it is more accurate to regard as punishment anything which frightens the child or makes things unpleasant for him.

The use of threats by parents to make children stop masturbation is far more prevalent than one would ordinarily think. Studies have shown that both the threats and the measures used are frequently shockingly severe. Over and over again parents admitted—often with pride—that they had warned a child that his genitals would be injured, that he would not be able to urinate, that he would get a hernia, or that he would be a cripple or "not grow strong." Some parents resorted to more drastic measures such as putting red pepper on the child's fingers or tying the legs to a high chair. Slapping the hands was one of the most frequent of the mild punishments.

These parents cared about their children and thought they were doing the right thing. Such lack of knowledge can

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

nevertheless have tragic results, no matter how well-meaning the parents may be.

Some Suggestions for Parents and Teachers

Do not use any harsh or severe methods to break masturbation such as threats, punishment, scolding, humiliation or mechanical restraint. It is better not even to use mild reprimands such as "It isn't nice;" "people won't like you." Never tell the child that he will injure himself, get sick, become infected or not grow. And never slap his hands or use any other kind of punishment or restraint. Do not offer rewards in order to make him give it up.

Ordinarily it is better not to call the child's attention to his masturbation or discuss it, especially if he is very young (only three or four). However, he is pretty likely to hear about it from other adults sooner or later, and possibly in such a way as to upset him. Therefore, if he is old enough, say five or so, it may be advisable to say "Some people think that does not look well. It is better not to do it when you are around others." If he has been scolded elsewhere, or if he seems to be trying to get over the habit, discuss it with him, reassure him, tell him that it is not important but that some people object.

If you are a teacher, and a child is masturbating so much in nursery or kindergarten that the other parents or teachers seem disturbed or embarrassed, one of your chief tools will have to be distraction. Keep the child busy, keep his hands occupied, note the kinds of toys and activities he enjoys most, help him to be friends with the other children. Do not let the criticism of others push you into drastic action or a direct attack on the problem which you think is unwise.

What to Do—To Help Yourself

- Remember that a certain amount of masturbation is only a part of normal growing up.
- If you are worried, try not to show your concern. This will not be easy if you yourself were taught that mas-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

turbation would cause all sorts of dreadful things. But it becomes easier as you gradually grasp the fact that you do not *need* to worry.

– Try to understand that some masturbation is to be expected in all young children and indeed in older children too. There is little reason for distress.

What to Do–To Help the Child

Look at the child's daily life as one complete picture. Analyze its parts and see if they add up to one happy whole.

Here are the questions to ask yourself:

– Does he have plenty of physical activity–space to run and climb, a chance for outdoor play?

– Does he have companions of his own age? Is he included in the group when he plays with other children? Is he liked by other children?

– Does he have appropriate things to play with? Not expensive toys–but things to push and pull and tug, things to put in and take out and drag around, paints, clays, crayons–things which he can handle in his own way? Is he allowed to take a few favorite toys to bed with him so that before he goes to sleep and after he wakes up, he has things to keep him happy and busy?

– Does he have reason to feel loved and accepted in his own home–with not too much expected of him, not constantly scolded or punished? Does he have assurance that he is growing in ability and independence?

When the answer to most of these questions can be "yes," masturbation is not likely to be a problem.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

When a Child Has Fears

STRANGE or violent fears are quite common to children between two and six. These fears should not alarm parents too much since they are usually a phase in the child's life which quickly passes. On the other hand they must be considered thoughtfully because they may be a sign that things are not going well. The child's present and future well-being demands that they be handled with intelligent and sympathetic understanding.

As ridiculous and foolish as a child's fears may seem to an adult they are very real to the child, and therefore must be respected. A parent or teacher can do a great deal to prevent fears, but in order to do so it is first necessary to know where fears come from and what makes them grow.

There Are Two Kinds of Fears

In both children and adults there is the reasonable fear of a truly dangerous situation. There is another unreasonable, sometimes more intense, fear which is based on the dread of a danger which does not actually exist.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The first is the *normal fear* any person feels when face-to-face with real danger. When the danger is real, not only is it normal to be afraid but it would be abnormal *not* to be afraid. The second kind of fear is called *"anxiety."* The person who suffers from this kind of fear feels upset but often does not know why. He worries without knowing exactly what he is worrying about or attaches his worry to some trivial thing which is obviously not the real cause.

The difference between this anxiety and normal fear is that normal fear is a response to what goes on outside; anxiety is related to a deeper uneasiness about problems within oneself. It is not caused by a real, external danger such as fast moving traffic, but by a deep inner feeling of helplessness when there is nothing to be afraid of, in reality.

Therefore whenever a child shows fright which is out of proportion to the true danger of the situation, you can be sure that there is some anxiety lurking in the background. Chronic or long continued anxiety is harmful to the child—today and later in life as well. That is why it is important to treat all signs of it seriously.

Examples of the Ordinary Fears of Children

Here are some of the more common fears of infants and children up to about the age of two:

- Falling, loss of support
- Noise and things which make noise
- Sudden movement and a combination of noise and movement
- Strange, unfamiliar objects, persons, situations

Beginning at about two or three, these are common fears:

- Being left alone, especially in a strange place or in the dark
- Pain and injury; also objects and people associated with pain, such as medical instruments, doctors, hospitals

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

- Animals
- Crippled people
- Death

Some Fears Are Due to Painful Experiences in the Past

If a child knows from his own experience that a certain object or situation may hurt him, he reacts with fear; that is normal and to be expected. For instance, a child may have a particular fear that can be easily traced back to one specific frightening experience.

- He has been bitten by a dog. He becomes afraid of dogs, perhaps of all animals, reports many bad dreams about animals.
- He has had a painful operation. He becomes afraid of doctors, doctors' offices, men in white coats, medical instruments, hospitals.

These fears are typical of those caused by painful experiences. They can be considered entirely normal even though there is a little anxiety present.

Children Are More Easily Frightened When Parents Are Absent

A child may have a particular fear that can be traced to a frightening experience which is less easily recognized because it was made up of a combination of factors.

- The child is awakened by a violent thunderstorm and finds himself alone in a dark room. He fears storms thereafter. He may have experienced many worse storms while playing in the daytime or when there were other people in the room with him. It was the combination of noise, flashes of light and being alone in the dark that created the fear.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

- He is rushed at and gushed over by a loud, tactless stranger at a time when his mother has left the room. Thereafter he shows a sudden and deep-dyed fear of strangers. He may have had similar experiences while clinging to his mother which had no effect on him.

In these examples, a *combination* of certain things was the cause of the fear. Notice that the absence of the parent was the important element in both cases.

A child can take many things in his stride when his parents are near; when they are away the same things can be terrifying, because he knows from experience that many times something may hurt him when his parents are away and that he is quite safe when they are there. These are normal responses to normal fears.

"Anxiety" Begins When the Young Child Feels Unloved

Let us review a few of the high points about anxiety. To the young infant the most important thing in his small world is the love of his parents or whatever adults are caring for him. On their love depends his life and happiness. He senses this with everything in his tiny being. When he is confident of their love, he has the basic security on which to build the rest of his life. When he is unsure, security is gone and everything which happens to him is potentially dangerous. He becomes filled with anxiety.

And yet, even when the parents are completely devoted to the child's welfare, many things do happen to him to make him fear this loss of love. He is at times hungry, or cold, or sick, or uncomfortable, or left alone for long hours or suddenly taken care of by a stranger. As he grows older, he is not always wisely handled even by the most loving parents. He may be scolded, threatened, punished, told that he is bad. For instance, he may be scolded for masturbation, and this can make him afraid.

Or he may be deprived or frustrated in many ways, kept from doing what he wants to do, or from receiving the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

love he needs to assure him that he is safe. For instance, suppose a new baby brother or sister arrives. The older child is jealous. He would like to hurt the baby—and hurt the parents too—but dares not express his feelings lest they love him still less, and try to get even with him by hurting him just as he wants to hurt them.

These are brief examples of how anxiety develops. To the anxious child, anything, everything is a possible danger. Because of this, he cannot take in his stride the normal frightening experiences of childhood as can a better adjusted child. The deep feelings of fear which he has inside are "displaced" onto things and situations outside. He seems to be afraid of some particular thing but what he is really expressing is his own inside fear.

That is why his fears may seem excessive and may seem to have little to do with the real-life situation. And that is why it is necessary to understand his anxiety in order to eliminate his fears.

Some Examples of "Anxiety Fears"

The secure, well-adjusted child is frightened by the same things which frighten a child who is filled with anxiety, but there is often a difference in the way the anxious child shows fear. For one thing he may react more violently and be harder to quiet. As mentioned before, his fear may be entirely out of proportion to the thing causing it, and may seem quite unrelated. He may be afraid of many different things and his fears may shift from one situation to another.

He may, for instance, unaccountably start being afraid of details connected with his routine, such as going to the toilet, going to bed, being bathed. . . . When he is older, he may have phases of fearing first his own illness or death, or that of his parents or brother or sister; then he's afraid of being kidnapped; then whatever catastrophe he has heard about recently—flood, fire, earthquake, bombing—may be the thing most feared. . . . He may show sudden unexplainable fear of some one object, such as his father's pajamas. . . .

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

He may be afraid of injury to himself or others, and may acquire a fear of crippled people—that is people who have already been injured—because he is afraid of being like them.

This kind of reaction is called "free-floating" anxiety. The choice of the object or situation which the child fears is of small importance compared to the fact that the child is showing his own inner fear—basic anxiety.

Reassure the Frightened Child

Suppose a young child shows sudden, violent terror. You may or may not have seen the cause of his fear but you know he's frightened because he screams, tries to get away or clings to you. You may be embarrassed if this happens in public; you may think he's too old to behave that way, that he could control himself if he tried, or that his fear is groundless. Feeling these things, you may be tempted to treat the child as if he were naughty. But really he's frightened. You may be tempted to be a little severe or try to reason with him. That is not the best way. The child needs just the opposite kind of attention. He needs to be soothed and reassured.

Take him in your arms, (unless he objects). Talk to him gently, caress him as you hold him, let him feel your protection, your physical strength, your fondness for him. Do not attempt to reason with him now while he is still frightened. By all means do not try to shock him out of his fear with threats of what may happen to him if he doesn't stop screaming. Nor should you ever shame the child with "You're too big a girl for that" or "Only sissies are afraid."

When he has calmed down a bit, when he is sure he is safe and protected, try to divert or distract his attention. Don't expose him again to the frightening experience in order to prove to him that his fear was groundless. Wait until you can see that he has gained more courage and that he himself wants to get over his fear.

For instance, do not make him pat the dog that frightened him in order to prove that the dog won't bite. Later on,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

while you hold the child close and speak in reassuring tones, *you* might pat the dog. Be careful, though, to keep the dog far enough away from the child so that he feels no fear. If the child shows that he is trying to conquer his own fear—if he is obviously trying to get up his courage to pat the dog—it is a good idea to let him if you can be sure that the dog will not frighten him again.

Whenever he shows signs of *wanting* to get over his fears, give him whatever help you can. Encourage him to talk about his fears if he seems so inclined. When he seems almost over his fear, perhaps only half afraid, let him joke about it a little (but never, never tease him). Let him play it out, too, in games and stories.

Remember, a child cannot be *forced or reasoned* into giving up a fear. He can be led up to it only when he feels safe. So don't hurry him—let him take his time.

Happy Times Will Help Conquer His Fears

If the thing feared is a necessary part of the daily schedule, concentrate on making that occasion as pleasant and relaxed as possible. For example:

- If a child is afraid of staying in bed in the dark, try to make going to bed a happy time. Spend a few minutes in quiet companionship with him after the lights are out. If he wishes it, arrange to have a light he can reach from his bed or leave the light on. At the same time assure him that some day, when he is older, he'll not mind the dark. But make sure he doesn't think such courage is something you demand of him.

On other occasions, the fear of an object or situation can be overcome by including it in the daily routine when the child feels happy and at ease.

In general . . . whether the child's fears are real or fancied, in the daytime when awake, or nightmares while asleep—to overcome a child's fears, try to help the child to help himself. Help him to develop skills and friendships and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

outgoing interests so that eventually he will be able to deal with dangers in his own way without the need of an adult's help.

Many Fears Can Be Prevented

It is always better to try to prevent any problem than to try to cure it after is has occurred. Many of the fears of children can be prevented if one is on the alert for situations known to create fear. Try to think how the situation will look to the child. Remember how common it is for a young child to be afraid of noise and sudden movement. Therefore, when he's still little, don't take him out on the station platform just as the locomotive is coming in; don't show him toys that suddenly jump out and do things; don't show him the new horn too close.

You may know "there's nothing to be afraid of" but that does not help the child. You may know that a frisky pup is "perfectly harmless," but how does this creature seem to a young child who has never played with one. (Again —remember the fear of noise and sudden movement.) You may know that a clap of thunder won't hurt the child but *he* has not yet learned that, and it is a good idea to step into his bedroom ready to soothe him should he awaken terrified. Many frightening situations can be avoided if a parent is on hand at the moment and takes time to give the desired reassurance.

When possible, remove the object of fear—or remove the child. Especially if he is only a year or two old, try not to rely too much on language for warning. Don't keep saying, "Look out," "Be careful," "It's hot," "Go slow," "You'll fall." Instead, swoop him up and deposit him in a safer spot and start him off on a new line of interest.

Prepare the Child for Frightening Situations Which Are Unavoidable

Two especially terrifying experiences for a child are to feel pain and to be deserted by his parents. New things scare him too, under certain circumstances. Therefore:

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

- If he has to go to the hospital to have his tonsils out or for any other operation, the situation has three fear-making elements: pain, absence of his parents, and new surroundings. The parent can lessen the child's fear by explaining things beforehand in a matter-of-fact way (although don't tell him so much that he will be more frightened than ever.) Describe the things he will like about being in a hospital. Never lie to the child—don't tell him you'll be back in a few minutes when you leave him if you are not coming back until the next day. Tell him that he is going to be uncomfortable for a while in order to be healthier later, and assure him that everything will be all right.

- If a mother has to leave her child for the first time, or if the child is about to enter nursery school, short separations, gradually lengthened, will prepare him in advance for the longer separation in the offing. Or if he is to do something for the first time—a first party, a first train trip, a visit to someone else's home, entrance in nursery school or kindergarten—he should have an explanation in advance of what to expect. Then the newness of the situation will be less likely to frighten him and he'll be able to enjoy it.

- If a young child is to be left in the care of another person, *it is exceedingly important for him to know that person in advance.* Many disturbances of childhood and later life have been traced to the shock a young child experienced when suddenly, without previous preparation, he was left in the care of a stranger. To him this is the same as being deserted by his mother. He has little sense of time and only partly understands explanations such as "later," "tomorrow," "next week." Mere words cannot soothe his anxieties. Whether nurse, "sitter," maid, neighbor, foster-parents or whoever, it is worth considerable effort and inconvenience to arrange for the young child to become well acquainted *in advance* with the person with whom he is to be left. If a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

real emergency makes it impossible to plan this way in advance, be on the look-out for signs for anxiety afterwards and do whatever you can to reassure the youngster.

Avoid These Known Causes of Anxiety

Since all anxiety spells trouble for the child, it is worth a lot of effort to see that he is not exposed to anxiety-creating situations—such as these:

- Never let anyone threaten to injure his genitals.
- Never let people, even as a joke, make frightening threats such as that the bogeyman, policeman or some character in a story will "get" him, or that he or anyone else will get sick or die.
- It is better not to let any child, not even an infant, sleep in the room where his parents have intercourse.
- Whenever possible, avoid leaving him with a person who dislikes children, who is insensitive or unsympathetic, or the "fusser" who worries over every little thing.
- If he begins to show new fears at a time when you are struggling with his toilet training or his eating, postpone all your efforts for a while and try some new methods later.
- Avoid movies, radio thrillers, exciting stories, hair-raising comics, for children under six.

Since some children are much more sensitive than others, it will be necessary to take extra precaution to guard them against frightening experiences throughout their childhood years.

Build Self Confidence to Overcome Fear

Help him to become skilfull, outgoing and friendly, so that he will have the self-confidence necessary to face and deal with the frightening things he meets. Everything he learns to do for himself, to his own satisfaction, every new

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

friend he makes, takes him one more step on the road to independence. If he becomes a self-contained little person with a real inner assurance he will need less *re*assurance from his parents.

Give him lots of opportunity to have fun with people and things—companions, active outdoor play, new experiences. Encourage his friendships. Take him where other children are and where he gets along easily; invite children to the house. Help him gradually, easily, pleasantly, to become less dependent on adults.

Protect the child from the things that destroy confidence. Repeated failures, too much competition, neglect, criticism—these are but a few. Never attempt to shame the child out of his fear with such ideas as "You're too big to be afraid." Don't be afraid your little boy will grow up to be a "sissie" just because he shows fears at two and three and four. He will be much more likely to grow into a confident, independent young man at 14 if his fears are dealt gently with at 4.

Make friends with him, spend time with him, take him on excursions, make toys for him, listen to him, take an interest in his friendships. Let him plan with you little visits away from home, teach him new skills suitable to his age. These will all help to build self-confidence—the real fortress against fears.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
3 9015 05143 6619

Suggested Reading

*EATING PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN—A Guide for Parents. An attractively illustrated pamphlet which offers practical advice to parents on the main factors in helping children develop good eating habits. Also contains constructive suggestions for handling specific eating problems. 15¢.

*FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS OF THE CHILD. By Lawrence K. Frank. A practical guide which describes the basic emotional needs of children. 20¢.

*KEYSTONES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL THINKING ABOUT YOUNG CHILDREN. By Nina Ridenour. An excellent pamphlet which includes basic ideas about children's needs and their behavior. 20¢.

*YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT – EVEN IF YOU ARE A PARENT. By Jean Schick Grossman. A warm-hearted pamphlet that offers comforting reassurance to parents. 20¢.

**Available fom National Association for Mental Health, 1790 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. (Prepayment required on orders under $2.) Quantity rates on request.*

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Acknowledgments

Warm appreciation is extended to the many people who participated in planning and criticizing various of these pamphlets without, however, placing on them any responsibility for the points of view stated. It is impossible to list all their names but special acknowledgment is expressed to the following:

WINIFRED ALLEN
WINIFRED ARRINGTON
ELEANOR BARNES
LEONA BAUMGARTNER, M.D.
SAMUEL BERENBERG, M.D.
BARBARA BIBER, PH.D.
THOMAS W. BROCKBANK, M.D.
LAWRENCE K. FRANK
CORNELIA GOLDSMITH
AMY HOSTLER
MABEL HUSCHKA, M.D.
MARY FISHER LANGMUIR, PH.D.
CATHERINE MACKENZIE
MARIAN MCBEE
BEATRICE ROBBINS
MARGARET SOMMERS, M.D.
BENJAMIN SPOCK, M.D.
JESSIE STANTON

Appreciation also goes to many members of the staffs of the Day Care Division of the New York City Department of Welfare and the Day Care Centers under its supervision, and to the staffs of the Bureau of Child Hygiene and Bureau of Nursing of the New York City Department of Health.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

THIS booklet is a sequel to the well known "Child Guidance Leaflets," including the "Series on Eating." It was prepared in the same manner and with the same care, and it is hoped that it will fulfill an even wider need than the successful Guidance Series.

The purpose of SOME SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN is to bring to parents and teachers a point of view which will make their relations with children smoother and more constructive, and will give children greater opportunities for happiness.

The suggestions contained in this booklet can be described as:

PRACTICAL . . . because they meet everyday questions. Parents and teachers were first consulted in planning the subject matter. They reported their most frequent and pressing problems and the kind of help they wanted. The material is designed to meet their expressed needs.

AUTHORITATIVE . . . because they represent a wide range of the thinking of authorities in many fields of child care. Here you will find a distillation of the literature on these problems, and of the experiences of people working and living with children—nursery school teachers, psychiatrists, pediatricians, social workers, psychologists, public health nurses and parents.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN